

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT FOR
PRACTISING LIBRARIANS AND INFORMATION
STAFF OF INSTITUTIONS IN DEVELOPED AND
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Information
Sciences
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staff paper

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Due to accelerated growth and expansion of knowledge and technology, the fear of obsolescence is the main driving force in furthering professional development of librarians and other information-handling professionals in order to maintain their job effectiveness.

Governments in developed countries have been providing opportunities to their information staff for up-dating their knowledge and learning new skills through short courses, seminars, meetings, etc. In Canada, the Public Service Commission, the Public Archives of Canada, and other Departments, have been creating formal and informal training opportunities on different levels and specialities for government information workers. Furthermore, government support has enabled many to participate in training events provided by non-governmental bodies.

Practising librarians/information specialists in developed countries expect Library/information science schools to provide them with continuing education opportunities that would reflect a pattern of progression and a link between the informal learning experience and formal education.

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While some schools have been providing good programs in continuing education (short courses, seminars, non-credit courses especially designed for practitioners, etc.), others have been offering only a minimal level of activity by admitting non-degree students to regular university courses but with no modification made to the courses to meet the needs and objectives of continuing education as the schools feel that any modification would weaken the standards of the degree-seeking programs. In general, academic institutions consider their primary function to be the training of students for degrees and the generation of knowledge through research.

Some universities feel that they cannot be expected to supply all the effort in continuing education. Rather, it should be a collaborative effort between universities, training professionals, associations, employers and the individual.

A more effective educational role of library/information science schools would imply continuous adaptation of the curriculum to behavioural, societal and technological advances and to the provision of courses needed by the participants in their present job. Such courses should be interdisciplinary in scope, flexible and not bound by insistence upon credits and advanced degrees.

Practising librarians/information professionals also feel that education should be one of the most vital functions of professional associations if they hope to fulfill their obligations to members, who would like to see the associations assume a more important role in providing opportunities for furthering their education.

Continuing education is also a necessity in developing countries. It is needed in the more traditional areas of librarianship as well as in the areas of information processing and dissemination by the use of modern technologies.

University library/information science schools in developing countries are well aware of the urgency of providing training opportunities for practising professionals but there are very few which actually offer this kind of training. Most of the schools experience difficulties (financial, lack of teaching staff, etc.) in coping with their regular programs and the assurance of their continuity either at degree or certificate level.

Some national and regional library associations in developing countries feel strongly about their responsibility to provide practising librarians with training opportunities and have organized short courses, seminars, etc. for their members on

subjects needed to improve their knowledge and performance on the job. Many such training events, especially those organized on a regional basis, have been made possible by financial support from international agencies.

Training in methodologies of data input and computerization for international cooperative information systems (e.g. AGRIS, CARIS) has been available to developing countries participating in these systems under the sponsorship of their coordinating centres and usually with financial assistance from donor development agencies.

Furthermore, UN specialized organizations, such as Unesco and FAO, and development agencies, e.g. IDRC and DSE (Deutsche Stiftung für Entwicklung), have been sponsoring short courses in different areas of information handling for practising librarians in developing countries. Although admission to these courses normally requires previous education in library/information science schools, for many who participate this is their first exposure to formal training in the field.

Opportunities for the training of practising professionals in developing countries through short courses are limited and have been available to only a few, and, in many instances - because of the wrong choice of candidates - not to those who actually need it to improve their work.

**TRAINING FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES SPONSORED BY THE
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE (IDRC)**

IDRC was established in 1970 by the Parliament of Canada as an autonomous public corporation to stimulate and support research for the benefit of developing countries. IDRC is governed by a 21-member Board of Governors appointed by the Canadian government. Under the IDRC Act, the chairman, vice-chairman and nine other governors must be Canadian citizens; the other 10 are non-Canadians. IDRC's headquarters are in Ottawa, where it has an international staff; there are regional offices in Asia, East Africa, West Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.

IDRC's activities are carried out by four program divisions, namely: Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Sciences, Health Sciences, Information Sciences, and Social Sciences. All program divisions provide assistance to developing countries through projects which are established on the basis of careful negotiations with institutions that have requested IDRC's assistance.

Projects in the field of library/information science are the responsibility of the Information Sciences Division (ISD). ISD's support of information activities may range from simple

operations to the establishment of a complex specialized information centre in subject areas of science and technology, social sciences and health sciences.

Beneficiaries of ISD projects in developing countries are mainly ministries, national research institutions, universities which function with varying degrees of governments' involvement, regional and international research institutions established with agreements of participating countries' governments, etc.

SUPPORT OF TRAINING WITH ISD FUNDS

1. Training components of ISD projects

During the early stages of negotiations of most ISD projects, it usually becomes obvious that training in one or several information areas will be needed for the staff who will carry out new functions and tasks under the project. Thus, a training component is carefully elaborated and an appropriate budget is included in the project.

Depending on the needs of a particular project, the following types of training may be supported:

- academic (for degree);
- short courses, seminars, workshops;
- in-service training;
- study tours.

Academic training to the Master's level has been supported mainly for persons who will assume managerial responsibilities of projects.

Short courses, seminars, etc. have been the favoured type of training for projects. In most cases they concentrate on one area of information handling.

In-service training at well-run libraries/information centres has been used for practical training in both specific and general areas of information handling. In many instances this type of training has taken place because of unavailability of short courses.

Study tours are seldom supported. Occasionally, they are allowed to enable project leaders to study the organization and management of well established information units.

Training within projects presents certain disadvantages, the main one being that the staff who should be working on the project are absent on training.

Short absences to attend a brief course or seminar, do not usually create a problem. However, the situation is different in case of academic training when a staff member can be absent from 1 to 2 years. This is often the duration of many projects, but it can be extended beyond that time to ensure adequate functioning.

Students for degree programs must comply with all university requirements. Universities in North America and Europe have strict admission requirements as far as educational background is concerned. Applicants must provide proof of previous studies in the form of transcripts from educational institutions. The universities also insist on a good command of the English language and require proof of successfully passing a language test, in most cases, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

It is difficult for many students to provide all documents required by the universities on time and the starting date of their studies often has to be postponed.

2. Training projects of ISD

Divisional support of training is mainly provided through components which form part of a more complex project but occasionally, in response to a well-justified request, a training project is supported. A good example of such a project is the course on Management of Information Centres which took place in China in 1982.

3. Division Activity Projects (DAP)

A small fund is available in the ISD to allow staff of projects and program-related institutions to attend seminars, short courses, workshops, etc.

THE FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS DIVISION OF IDRC (FAD)

The general purpose of the Fellowships and Awards Division is to contribute to institution-building in developing countries through a series of fellowships, awards and training schemes that support and encourage the growth and research capabilities in regional and national institutions in developing countries.

A complementary thrust is encouragement on a limited scale for Canadians to become involved in research in international development.

Programs of individual awards are a major area of FAD's work in support of Centre-funded projects and programs. These are available under the following categories:

I. Programs for developing countries

1. Project-Related Awards

- a) Pre-Project Awards for staff who have been identified by their institutions and an IDRC program division as team members of a proposed IDRC project. The obvious advantage of using this category by program divisions is the availability of training before the actual start of a project, thus avoiding absence of staff on training during the life of a project.
- b) Post-Project Awards are provided for key staff members who have participated in IDRC-supported projects, to enhance their contribution to their home institution. The duration of tenure varies according to the type of training. In the case of ISD, it does not usually go beyond the Master's level, which may take from 1 to 2 years.

2. Program-Related Awards

The objective of these awards is focused on staff development in institutions to enhance institutional development. Requests must fall within divisional training strategies and in areas of work related to the program priorities of IDRC. This category is available for training at different levels, i.e. Masters' degrees, diploma courses, internship, practical attachments, doctoral and post-doctoral studies. ISD has used this category for training staff of institutions that are not actual beneficiaries of ISD projects but whose work is related to ISD programs.

3. Group Training Programs. The objectives of this program activity are two-fold: to improve the technical, research and administrative skills of individuals through tailored practical training courses, and to increase the training competence and expertise of regional institutions in areas within IDRC's program priorities which demonstrate the need for training.

IDRC research divisions, in consultation with FAD, identify and select suitable courses, which are

generally non-degree, subject-specific, short-term and taught by local and regional staff wherever possible. ISD is presently looking into two proposals, from Asia and Africa, for group training support.

The above-mentioned FAD training categories are those most commonly used by ISD in support of its projects and programs. Additional categories exist but are mainly used by other IDRC divisions as they are more suitable for the training requirements of their programs.

II. Programs for Canadians (Co-operative Programs)

Young Canadian Research Awards

These are awards to Canadian graduate students, or to teaching staff, in a field of study related to the program priorities of the Centre's research divisions. Their objective is to facilitate the involvement of younger Canadians in research on Third World issues. The training almost always takes place in a research or training institution in a developing country.

Location of training

IDRC's training policy specifies preferences of geographical locations in which IDRC-supported training should take place. In order of preference, the training should be carried out:

- a) in the country of the candidate;
- b) in the region of the candidate (if not available in his/her country);
- c) in other developing regions (if not available in the region of the candidate);
- d) in Canada; and
- e) in other industrialized countries (if not available in Canada).

This requirement is given serious consideration by divisional program staff when planning training for projects. In many cases, useful training can be obtained in the regions, in an environment familiar to the trainees, where they also have a chance to learn about common problems and ways of solving them.

ISD receives many requests for training directly from librarians and others engaged in information work in developing countries. Unfortunately, we are unable to support most of these requests as the limited funds available for training must be used in connection with divisional projects and programs.

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